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ABSTRACT

As part of a study of the quality of life in northwestern Wisconsin, 1974 sample populations (N=150 residents per county) from each of 5 Wisconsin counties (Bayfield, Douglas, Price, Taylor, and Washburn) were presented with a list of public service programs and asked if they should be "expanded", "kept the same", or "cut back". Percentages on comparable items from a 1973 study of Ashland, Burnett, and Rusk counties in northwestern Wisconsin were used for comparative analysis. The list of services included programs for: teenagers; drug prevention and treatment; public housing (including the elderly); the aged; medical services and doctors; mental health; social services (welfare and food stamps); state and Federal highways; local streets and roads; public transportation; schools; vocational training; other adult education; university extension; library and bookmobile services; art and music; police; water pollution control; areas for wildlife protection; public parks/forests; public promotion of tourism. In general, results indicated: a consensus regarding priority expansion of programs for teenagers, drug prevention/treatment, the aged, public housing, health and medical care, and public transportation; support for spending was higher in the Lake Superior counties and had increased since 1973; support for increased spending increased with education, income, and youth; rural residents were more likely to want programs to remain the same. (JC)

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PREFERENCES FOR EXPANSION OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN EIGHT NORTHWEST WISCONSIN COUNTIES

by

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PREFERENCES FOR EXPANSION OF PUBLIC SERVICES IN EIGHT NORTHWEST WISCONSIN COUNTIES

(prepared by Virginia Lambert)

As a part of a study of the "quality of life" in northwestern Wisconsin, a sample of residents in five counties (Bayfield, Douglas, Price, Taylor and Washburn) were questioned about public services in their communities. Each person was presented with a list of programs and asked whether they should be "expanded", "kept the same", or "cut back". The question was prefaced with a reminder that more services generally mean higher taxes. The results, then, indicate not only the services which are lacking in these counties, but also those services which people think merit more tax money. Approximately 150 people from each county were included in the sample.

Table 1 shows the percentage of the total sample in each county who said that services should be expanded, or cut back (if 5 percent or more). The responses of those who said they should be kept the same and of those who responded that they did not know are not shown. Percentages on comparable items from a study done in 1973, in three other northwest counties (Ashland, Burnett, Rusk) are included for purposes of comparison, but discussion of these three counties is limited to the conclusion of the paper.

Table 2 shows the 10 services in each county having the highest percentage in favor of expansion, giving an indication of the top priority programs. In interpreting this table, two factors should be kept in mind. First, policy questions which have not been included here may actually be more important than any of these items. For example, results of the 1973

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGES INDICATING EXPANSION OF SERVICES BY COUNTY
(Percentage Wanting Services Cut Back 5 Percent or More in Parentheses)

	1974 SURVEY					1973 SURVEY		
	Bayfield	Douglas	Price	Taylor	Washburn	Ashland	Burnett	Rusk
Programs for Teenagers[1]	66	67	58	62	59	58	47	57
Drug Prevention & Treatment	49	69	64	55	53	57	55	51 (7)
Public Housing (incl. for elderly)	53 (5)	58	56 (7)	45	58	21 (8)	37 (8)	30 (3)
Programs for the Aged	53	62	60	37	40	48	30	28
Medical Services & Doctors	44	62	77	47	40	42	36	45
Mental Health Programs	40	58	56	31	22	32	35	35
Social Services (Welfare & Food Stamps)	22 (29)	19 (27)	13 (26)	6 (34)	9 (26)	11 (22)	10 (34)	9 (33)
State & Federal Highways[2]	62	48	33 (5)	10 (9)	32 (5)			
Local Streets & Roads[2]	57	42	40	43	24	50	20	24
Public Transportation	45	48	29	27	24	25	28	37
Schools	29	30 (8)	27	18 (7)	26	12 (9)	22 (8)	11 (6)
Vocational Training[3]	28	46	37	34 (5)	33	30	36	43
Other Adult Education	24	41	34	25	18	13	28	24
University Extension	14	18	31	12	17	11	18	16
Library & Bookmobile Services	13	21	35	19	11	9	34	24
Art & Music Programs	26 (5)	26	40	19	19	26	33	19
Police	25	40	29	27	24	28	24	23
Water Pollution Control	44	64	31 (9)	26	33	26	37	39
Areas for Wildlife Protection	44	45	39	33	28	30	12	36
Public Parks	26 (5)	29	31	19	35	21	20	19
Public Forests[4]	19 (6)	29	15 (11)	12	20 (6)	--	--	--
Public Promotion of Tourism	26 (14)	40 (9)	29 (7)	18 (7)	14 (16)	50	20	24

1. 1973 Study - Programs for Youth
2. 1973 Study - these 2 items were combined as Roads and Highways
3. 1973 Study - Job Training
4. Not included in 1973 Study

study, where "promotion of industry" was included, suggest that it would probably be among the priority items in all counties. Second, the fact that a particular program does not appear as a priority does not necessarily mean it is unimportant. Rather, it may indicate satisfaction with existing programs (i.e., most people say it should be "kept the same"), or that substantial improvement in the service would require unjustified increased spending.

In addition to discussion of responses by county, attention is also given to differences within the counties by place of residence, age, education and income of the respondents.*

Priority Programs

Overall, residents are satisfied with the public services in their communities, with the majority of people saying that spending on most services should be kept at the present level. However, there is a consensus across the counties on the priority programs for expansion. Programs for teenagers, drug prevention and treatment, programs for the aged, public housing, health and medical care, and public transportation appear among the top 10 programs in all counties. Services for which more than half of the people in the county favor expansion are indicated on Table 2.

The only service which more people feel should be cut back rather than expanded is "social services in general - including welfare and food stamps." Opposition to this program is especially strong in Taylor County where only 6 percent of the people think it should be expanded, while a third think it should be reduced.

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*For this analysis, we looked at responses in each county by age (three categories: under 35, 35 to 64, and 65 and over), education (three categories: no high school diploma, high school diploma, and some college), income (four categories; under $5000, $5000 to $10,000, $10,000 to $16,000, and over $16,000), and place of residence (urban, village, rural).

TABLE 2

TEN SERVICES MOST IN NEED OF EXPANSION, BY COUNTY
(Percent Favoring Expansion)

	1974 Study					1973 Study		
	Bayfield	Douglas	Price	Taylor	Washburn	Ashland	Burnett	Rusk
1	Teenagers(66)	Drugs(69)	Medical(77)	Teenagers(62)	Teenagers(59)	Rds.&Hwys(60)	Drugs(55)	Youth(57)
2	Highways(62)	Teenagers(67)	Drugs(64)	Drugs(55)	Housing(58)	Youth(58)	Rds.&Hwys(47)	Drugs(51)
3	Loc. Rds.(57)	Wat.Poll.(64)	Aged(60)	Medical(47)	Drugs(53)	Drugs(57)	Youth(47)	Medical(45)
4	Housing(53)	Aged(62)	Teenagers(58)	Housing(45)	Medical(40)	Tourism(50)	Wat.Poll(37)	Job Tr.(43)
5	Aged(53)	Medical(66)	Men.Hlth(56)	Loc.Rds.(43)	Pub.Trans(40)	Aged(48)	Housing(37)	Rds&Hwys(41)
6	Drugs(49)	Men.Hlth(58)	Housing(56)	Aged(37)	Aged(40)	Medical(42)	Job tr.(36)	Wat.Poll(39)
7	Pub.Trans.(45)	Housing(58)	Loc.Rds.(40)	Voc.Tr.(34)	Pub.Pks.(35)	Men.Hlth(32)	Medical(36)	Pub.Trans(37
8	Medical(44)	Pub.Trans(48)	Pub.Trans.(40)	Wildlife(33)	Wat.Poll(33)	Job Tr.(30)	Men.Hlth(35)	Wildlife(36)
9	Wat.Poll(44)	Highways(48)	Art & Mus.(40)	Men.Hlth.(31)	Voc.Tr.(33)	Wildlife(30)	Library(34)	Men.Hlth(35)
10	Wildlife(44)	Wildlife(44)	Wildlife(39)	Pub.Trans(29)	Highways(32)	Police(28)	Art & Mus.(33)	Housing(30)

Programs for Teenagers and Drug Programs

Lack of opportunities for young people is seen as a major problem in these counties, and the need for more programs for teenagers and for drug prevention and treatment stands out as particularly important. In all counties at least half of the respondents are in favor of expansion, and teen programs are the first priority in Bayfield, Taylor and Washburn.

The percentages of those favoring expansion of programs for teenagers are generally higher in the cities and villages than in the rural areas, while drug programs are generally more favored in rural areas. The only exception is in Douglas County where percentages on drug programs are higher for the City of Superior (72%) than for rural residents (58%).

Public Housing and Programs for the Aged

More than 50 percent of the people in all the counties except Taylor think that more public housing is needed. Since most housing projects in this region are for the elderly, the strong support of expanded public housing, and of programs for the aged probably reflects a concern for the elderly population in these counties. In all of the counties except Douglas, the percentage of the county's population over 65 years old is higher than for the state as a whole (11%). The emphasis on public housing programs may also be due to the general housing shortage in the region. Overall, support for expansion increased with education and income.

Since both programs for the aged and public housing benefit the elderly, it is interesting to compare the responses by age groups. The two younger groups (18 to 34 and 35 to 64 years old) give more support and a higher priority to expanded programs for the aged than do people

over 65. While people over 65 give a relatively low priority to programs for the aged, public housing is one of the highest priority programs for this group. More than half of the over 65 groups favors expansion of public housing in all counties except Taylor

Health and Medical Care

A problem of insufficient medical services in Price County is evident, with more than 75 percent of the people saying that health and medical care should be expanded. This percentage is higher than any single service in the other counties, and medical care is the highest priority program across all age, education, income and residence groups in Price. More than 50 percent of the people in Douglas County also say that health care should be expanded.

Health services are a lower priority for people over 65 years old than for the other two age groups, and except for Price County, support for expansion of health services is higher among high school graduates and people who have attended college, than for those who did not complete high school. In general, people in the middle income range ($5,000 to $16,000) are more in favor of expansion than people having incomes of less than $5,000 or more than $16,000. Differences by place of residence are small.

In both Price and Douglas, a majority of people also favor extension of mental health programs, and in Taylor, mental health is among the top 10 services. The support for more mental health programs is especially strong among people 18 to 34 years old, people with a high school diploma but no further education, and for the middle income

groups. There is little variation by residence, except that in Douglas County, the City of Superior (62%), and in Price, the rural areas (63%), are most in favor of expansion.

Roads and Public Transportation

Programs associated with transportation are also important. Public transportation is among the top 10 programs in all counties. In terms of priorities, improved public transportation is more important for people over 65 than for the younger age groups. The percentages favoring expansion are highest in the small cities and villages in Price and Taylor, and in Superior, in Douglas County. In Bayfield and Washburn there are no differences between the villages and the rural areas. There is little variation in support by education or income.

The need for both local roads and state and federal highways is much higher in Bayfield than in the other counties, and these programs remain as priorities across age, education, income and residence. In Price and Taylor, support is high for expansion of local roads, while in Douglas and Washburn, state and federal highways are the greater concern.

Educational and Cultural Services

Overall, expansion of educational programs is seen as a lower priority than the services already discussed. Only about a fourth of the people in all counties except Taylor think that spending on schools should be increased. Douglas is highest with 30 percent, but 8 percent of the people questioned there think school costs should be cut back. In Taylor, support for expanded schools is exceptionally low with 18 percent favoring expansion, while 7 percent want a reduction.

Support for school expansion decreased markedly with age in all counties. Only about 10 percent of those over 65 favor expansion. In general, support increased with education and income. In Price County, more than half of the people who attended college favor expansion, as compared to 20 percent of those with a high school education or less. Village residents are generally more favorable toward expanded schools than those in cities or rural areas, although in Price, the percentage for city residents is somewhat higher.

Among the other educational programs (vocational training, other adult education, university extension, library and bookmobile service, and art and music programs), vocational training stands out as the highest priority overall. In Taylor and Washburn, it is among the top ten programs, although the highest percentage of those favoring expansion is in Douglas. Support for more adult education is generally only slightly lower than for vocational training. University extension programs, library and bookmobile services, and art and music programs are low priorities. However, in Price County about a third of the people want more of all of these services, and support there is especially high for art and music programs (40%).

The patterns of support for expansion of these programs by age, education and income are basically the same as that found for schools. People under 35 years old are much more in favor of expansion of adult education and library services than are the older age groups. In Douglas County, this group also stands out in their particularly strong support for increased spending on vocational training (67%). The emphasis on art and music programs in Price County appears to be strongest among those with some college education (69%).

People who made more than $16,000 last year are highly favorable toward expansion of vocational training, except in Washburn County (35%). In Douglas and Taylor, 69 percent of this group favor expansion. The differences by place of residence are small, although rural residents in general are less favorable toward expansion than people in the cities and villages.

Police

In the ratings of community services, (see Report no. 1), "crime prevention and control," is given a poor rating relative to other programs. In contrast, support for expansion of police and law enforcement programs is relatively low, although the percentage for Douglas County (40%) is somewhat higher than for the others. The 18 to 34 age group favors expansion more than the older two groups in all counties except Price, where there is little variation by age. In both Taylor and Washburn, less than 10 percent of those over 65 favor expansion. Variation by education is minimal.

In Taylor County, the differences by income are striking. While 69 percent of the people making more than $16,000 favor expansion, only 13 percent of those who made less than $10,000 want more spending on police. Elsewhere, the income groups are about equal in their support, except in Bayfield where only 14 percent of the highest income group favor expansion.

Support for more law enforcement services is highest in the City of Superior (43%). Otherwise, it does not vary much by place of residence. The contrast between the low rating on crime control and the lack of support for expanded public programs may reflect the idea that even though crime is a problem in these areas, it cannot be easily remedied

by more police. Because of the dispersed settlement in the area, a very large increase in the police force would be needed in order to depress the crime rate.

Environment and Tourism

Several programs were included in the list which deal broadly with environmental conditions (water pollution control programs, public forest lands, public parks, and areas for wildlife protection). Water pollution control is among the priorities in Douglas, Bayfield and Washburn. It is especially high in Douglas, where two-thirds of the people think it should be expanded.

In these three counties the percentages favoring more spending on water pollution control is lower for those over 65 than for the two younger age groups, although the youngest in Bayfield and the middle group in Washburn are also relatively low. In terms of education, people who have attended college show the strongest support for expansion. Eightly percent of this group in Douglas favor more pollution control. Differences by income and place of residence are small, except that support for expansion is especially low for the top income group in Washburn (20%). There is little variation by individual characteristics in Price and Taylor. However, in Taylor the percentages for the highest income group (15%) and for the rural resident (6%) are very small.

The other environmental program for which support for expansion is relatively strong is "areas for wildlife protection." This is among the priorities in all counties except Washburn. Wildlife protection tends to be a higher priority among people under 35 and over 65 than for those in the middle age group.

Percentages favoring expanded public parks and forests are low across all counties, although expansion of parks is among the top 10 programs in Washburn. In Bayfield, Price and Washburn, some residents feel that money spent on public forests should be cut back. Five percent of the people in Bayfield also want a cut in the budget for public parks. In all of these counties, at least one-fourth of the land is already publically owned, and in Bayfield, almost half of the land is public.

The low level of support for more parks and forests may reflect in part the low level of interest in expansion of promotion of tourism. Support for more tourism is very low everywhere except in Douglas (40%), and all of the counties a substantial number of people want the revenue spent here to be cut back. (For a more complete discussion of these items on the environment and tourism see Report No. 3.)

Conclusion

Programs for special age groups, health and medical care, and transportation services are lacking in all counties. These same programs also appeared as priorities in the counties studied in 1973, although support for increased spending on public transportation and public housing is greater in the more recent survey. In addition, residents of four counties of the West Central Region (Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire and Polk), interviewed as a part of the present study, generally indicated the same needs.

While these services may be seen as deficient in the area as a whole, other programs stand out as needs of particular counties. In the Lake Superior counties, Douglas, Bayfield, Ashland, roads and highways are a high priority, especially in Bayfield and Ashland.

Expanded water pollution control programs are strongly supported in Douglas County, probably reflecting the publicity surrounding the taconite pollution of Lake Superior. This same concern is evident in Bayfield. Expanded pollution control is also important in Washburn and Burnett, with their numerous small lakes and increasing tourism.

Price County is exceptional in the large percentage of people there seeking expanded health and medical care, and in the interest of the highly educated in more educational and cultural programs. Health care was also a high priority in neighboring Rusk County in 1973.

Spending on educational and cultural programs, other environmental protection services (except wildlife protection), police, and public promotion of tourism is generally seen as adequate. The only programs which a significant number of residents think should be allocated less funds are social services, and tourism, although opposition is also found in some counties to public housing, state and federal highways, schools, and public forests.

Overall, the support for more spending on public services is higher in the Lake Superior counties than in the others, and it seems to have increased somewhat since 1973. However, this change may be due only to differences among the counties. A majority of the residents of Price also favor expansion of a large number of services, while those of Taylor, Burnett and Rusk tend to be more conservative about increased spending.

In general, the younger a person the more favorable he/she is toward expansion of services. Support for increased spending also increases with education and income, while residents of rural areas are more likely to say that programs should be kept the same rather than expanded.